



Tomato

History

Tomatoes are native to South America – more precisely to the Andean regions of Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. They were cultivated by the Incas and Aztecs since 700 AD. Tomatoes were introduced to Europe in 1554 by Spanish explorers who discovered the plant when traveling.

Tomato popularity was very slow to develop throughout Europe. Most people believed the food to be poisonous, likely due to it being a member of the nightshade family. This family includes a number of edible fruits, but many of the family's plants are highly poisonous. However, by the middle of the 18th century tomatoes were extensively being grown for food in Italy.

Tomato popularity gradually grew in the United States following the Europeans' use of it as a food. By 1812, tomatoes were frequently used as food in New Orleans. French and Italian settlers are likely responsible for the increase in tomato popularity.

Fun facts

- Thomas Jefferson grew tomatoes in his garden in 1781
- There are thousands of varieties of tomatoes grown across the world
- Tomato leaves and stems contain compounds that are toxic
- When introduced to Europe, tomatoes were called love apples
- The tomato is the state fruit and vegetable of Arkansas
- The heaviest tomato ever grown weighed nearly 8 lbs
- Tomatoes gain weight as they ripen – even after they have been picked

Fruit or Vegetable?

Botanically, the tomato is a fruit as it is the fleshy material covering seeds that is formed out of flower. However, in 1893, the United States Supreme Court ruled the tomato was a vegetable and subject to import taxes. They based this decision on the fact that tomatoes are generally cooked and served with dinner and not dessert. By labeling the tomato a vegetable, foreign countries were required to pay import taxes and were unable to flood the market with lower priced tomatoes. If not for this economic concern, tomatoes may have been considered a fruit.



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